

### Constructing corruption

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# Chapter 7:

## Constructing Corruption

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### 1. Introduction

As Deleuze and Guattari say to demonstrate the importance of concepts in philosophy and science: ‘Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator’s signature’ (1994: 5). Corruption, of course, is the concept of interest here. In this chapter, however, we will not study what the concept is or means, but discuss theories and studies that look at how the definitions of corruption have come about in academic and social discourses, with special emphasis on the *effects* of using the concept.

Other chapters in this book (e.g. Huisman/Vande Walle, Huberts, and Rose-Ackerman) study corruption empirically within a positivistic research tradition; here we will look at theoretical and empirical corruption research that can be called *post*-positivistic, meaning that they are not after one truth, or out to find and agree on one ‘right’ definition or meaning of the concept ‘corruption’. The corruption researchers we will cite use different terms to label their theoretical stance. Some call it ‘cultural’ or ‘anthropological’, others ‘neo-classical’, and there are even those who use the term ‘post-modern’. Discussions and controversies about postmodernism are numerous (e.g. Bauman 1991, 1993; Latour 1991), both in terms of the concept and the ensuing societal changes of the second half of the twentieth century. Reviewing them or exploring the rather vague notion of postmodernism is, however, outside the purview of this chapter. The scholars cited here are interested in how the *actors* define corruption. Most other approaches in this book define what the phenomenon of corruption entails and then look at the causes of that phenomenon. Here we especially look at the causes and effects of the usage of the very label ‘corruption’. When looking at corruption in this sense, language plays an important role and the concept of discourse becomes important.

## 2. The social construction of corruption

What is most striking when looking at the definitions of corruption in post-positivist studies is the emphasis on *social constructivism*: ‘corrupt’ is what is *considered* corrupt at a certain place and at a certain time. Or, as Andersson and Heywood (forthcoming) put it:

‘The key point is that there are many different types of corruption, which vary according to the sector in which they occur (public or private; political or administrative), the actors involved (for instance, state officials, politicians entrepreneurs and so forth), the impact they have (localized or extensive) and the degree to which they are formalized (embedded and systemic or occasional and sporadic).’

Eleven years ago, Michael Johnston (1996: 331-334) proposed to define corruption as ‘the abuse, according to the legal or social standards constituting a society’s system of public order, of a public role or resource for private benefit’. He suggested studying how the meaning of terms like ‘abuse,’ ‘public role,’ and ‘private benefit’ are constructed at a given moment in a certain place, and how and why the lines between public/private, state/society, politics/administration, and institutions/sources of power are drawn.

A wide range of corruption researchers draws attention to the contextuality of corruption and its various definitions. Huntington’s (1989: 377) much-used definition of corruption is ‘behavior of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends’. But just as ‘accepted norms’ change over time and across cultures, so do the distinctions between public and private, and between what is and is not corrupt. Many illustrations of this can be found in Haller and Shore (2005), who offer an array of authors’ perceptions of corruption in different cultural and institutional contexts with case studies from countries such as India, Bolivia, Portugal, Russia, Romania, and the United States. An example of their findings takes place in Russia’s transitional society of the 1990s, where personalized agreements between doctor and patient based on, say, a certain fee plus a few bottles of vodka, eventually superseded the official fee-for-service framework of state health care. Something that had been illegal and considered highly corrupt during the Soviet period – a physician commanding money for personal gain in exchange for services – was at that time considered morally acceptable. A patient-interviewee described such payment ‘as a moral action that conveyed recognition and respect for the professional’s attention and expertise’. A physician’s demand for high prices was more a sign of his or her medical competence than a reflection of connections or privilege. On the contrary, it was the institutional state health care system that was eventually regarded as corrupt for favoring the higher strata of the population. Not only does this example prove a shift in norms concerning appropriate provision of healthcare, it also signifies that overstepping the boundary between the public and private spheres is not always adequate in labeling corruption (Rivkin-Fish 2005: 47-49, 63).

Tänzler (2007), who advocates a ‘cultural approach’ to corruption, tells of a Philippine Prime Minister forced from office precisely because he was *not* corrupt. If the Prime Minister refused to use his power to take care of family and friends, the line of thinking was, then what could the public expect from him? Tänzler demonstrates the importance of deconstructing the social realities of culture to perceive corruption (see also De Zwart, this volume. Note that De Zwart explicitly distances himself from postmodern approaches).

Sissener (2001), who proposes an ‘anthropological perspective on corruption’, finds that Western approaches of corruption are often exactly that: they are peculiarly Western, influenced as they are by Weber’s famous ideal type of bureaucracy, and not easily applied to non-Western societies. Sissener then tries to understand the values behind behavior that a Western observer would probably regard as corrupt, and how the social reality in which the behavior takes place is constructed from the inside. In countries like Bangladesh, China or Nepal, the public official who issues favors for a remuneration of some kind within an established network is not corrupt; his or her actions are simply a social obligation to help. Deals within the network are considered normal (Sissener 2001).

### 3. The effects of the corruption concept

The point of the previous section was to lay ground for a concept of corruption that is heavily contested and socially constructed. Post-positivist corruption theories demonstrate that the definition and meaning of corruption is hardly trivial, that the effects of using the label ‘corruption’ can be major, that ‘what the concept *is* is less interesting than what it *does*, a shift in emphasis that also allows us to put aside the somewhat stale debate about universal or culturally relative elements’ (Bracking 2007: 11). Post-positivistic approaches discussed in the remainder of this chapter focus less on what corruption is than what the effects of its usage are. We are interested in what causes the use of the concept of ‘corruption’ and the consequences thereof. Any specific definition of corruption will automatically lead to a specific ‘solution’ (de Graaf 2007); instead we will look at the causes and effects of corruption definitions and discourses.

Being labeled ‘corrupt’ usually has an enormous social impact. We once interviewed a Dutch police officer who was convicted for taking a bribe from a former colleague, then an attorney. He was convicted for accepting a cell phone in exchange for leaking some minor information to the attorney during a long phone conversation. Both he and his wife were fired from the police force. His wife fought for several years in court before being reinstated. They lost most of their friends and suffered emotionally. They were largely shunned at the few social events they still took part in; others did not want to be in the presence of a ‘corrupt police officer.’

Because of these enormous social consequences, the most important issue 'may not be what the term 'corruption' means, but rather who gets to decide what it means and how widely those decisions will be accepted' (Le Billon 2005: 686). Not surprisingly, accusations of corruption are often used strategically: 'corruption serves to underwrite elite class formation in Zimbabwe, as well as being a key concept in discursive and ideological warfare between Mugabe and his opponents' (Bracking 2009: 43).

The definition issue also raises questions of cultural bias. As Chadda (2004: 122) writes on the use of TI's (Transparency International) definition in developing countries: 'To judge transactions originating in the traditional sphere as corrupt because they clash with the requirements of the legal rational order can be seen as simply an ideological argument for the rapid destruction of the traditional sphere.' Andersson and Heywood (forthcoming: 5) go so far as to claim that:

'the very concept of corruption has been increasingly instrumentalized for political ends since the end of the Cold War – most especially in those countries where corruption is perceived to be a major issue. Indeed the debate on the meaning and interpretation of corruption has led to the development of proposed solutions for corruption which focus primarily on issues of institutional design'.

#### 4. Language and Meaning

In recent decades, discussions on the nature of truth have profoundly affected social research. Instead of assuming a given world 'out there', waiting to be discovered, attention is being drawn to the language processes through which the world is represented. The access we have to a reality outside language is highly problematic. Language does not simply report facts; it is not a simple medium for the transport of meaning. The meaning and effect of words depend on the context in which they are spoken or written. Du Gay (1996: 47):

'The meaning that any object has at any given time is a contingent, historical achievement (...) theorists of discourse argue that the meaning of objects is different from their mere existences, and that people never confront objects as mere existences, in a primal manner; rather these objects are always articulated within particular discursive contexts'.

Perhaps it is the case, as some philosophers claim, that what exists in the world is a necessity (independent of human beings or language), but things can only be differentiated through language. The world itself does not give meaning to objects; this is done through language. Stated simply, although things might exist outside language, they get their meanings through language.

This view of language implies the possibility of describing the context of corruption (cases) as a discursive construction. The meaning of anything always exists in particular discursive contexts; meaning is always contextual, contingent, and historical. The term 'corruption', therefore, is always socially and historically constructed as well.

How can we transition from an ontological and epistemological stance of meaning that is always historically and socially constructed to a theoretical model useful to empirical research? De Graaf (2007) has offered an example from postmodern corruption research where empirical corruption research is conducted based on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social action (1977; 1990; 1998; Bourdieu/Wacquant 1992). By combining macro and micro factors and everything in between, it is an example of how concrete corruption case studies can be conducted. Contextual research in this way can establish dispositions that *can* lead to corruption. Since dispositions do not always manifest, they cannot be called 'causes' in the strict sense of the word. What is important in this type of research is the receptiveness of an individual to corruption, and whether the receptiveness is triggered.

## 5. Discourse and discourse analysis

The concept of discourse plays an important role in most post-positivistic corruption research and has many meanings. Of its many interpretations (see Alvesson/Karremann 2000), here we define discourse as 'a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities' (Hajer 1995: 44). For example, psychiatric discourse brought the idea of an unconscious into existence in the nineteenth century (cf. Foucault 1977; Phillips/Hardy 2002: 3). Discourses contain groups of statements that provide a way of talking and thinking about something, thereby giving meaning to social reality. Discourses are not 'out there' between reality and language; they are not just a group of signs. They refer to practices that systematically form the objects we speak of. Discourse is not just a 'way of seeing' – a worldview – but is embedded in social practices that reproduce the 'way of seeing' as 'truth.' Discourses are constitutive of reality (de Graaf 2001). What is and is not true cannot be seen outside discourse; it is internal to it. By looking at what people say and write, we can learn how their world is constructed.

Since discourses in our context institutionalize the way of talking about something, they produce knowledge and thereby shape social practices. Corruption cases cannot be understood without the discourses that give them meaning. Discourses contain the conditions of possibility of what can and cannot be said. The fact that a question arises about corruption is as interesting as the question asked (and the questions not asked). And every question asked gets some form of an answer (including no answer), which has consequences. Discourses help us understand that a certain question is asked, and give us the spectrum of possible solutions to problems arising from it, i.e., what is or is not seen as a viable solution to a specific moral problem. A problem's definition inevitably predisposes certain solutions, and vice versa

(Eeten 1998: 6; Kingdon 1995; Rochefort 1994; Wildavsky 1987). Compare this with the following quote from Schön and Rein (1993: 153):

'When participants (...) name and frame the (...) situation in different ways, it is often difficult to discover what they are fighting about. Someone cannot simply say, for example, 'Let us compare different perspectives for dealing with poverty,' because each framing of the issue of poverty is likely to select and name different features of the problematic situation. We are no longer able to say that we are comparing different perspectives on 'the same problem', because the problem itself has changed.'

Like meaning, values are immanent features of discourse. When we give meaning to something, we are also valuing it. Even though a Durkheimian view is clearly not endorsed here (our emphasis is on language, not institutions), there is a parallel. To Durkheim social institutions, collective ways of thinking, feeling, and doing are not empty but full of values (values give meaning to relationships). In similar fashion, discursive practices are not empty; they are filled with values. By giving something a name, we highlight certain aspects. But in that same process, all other possible qualities are placed in the background or even ignored. Values, causal assumptions and problem perceptions affect each other. In our daily lives, we jump so often between normative and factual statements that we do not realize how much our views of facts determine whether we see problems in the first place. But when we study those discussions more carefully, we can see that 'is' and 'ought' are intertwined. Seemingly technical positions in discourses on corruption ('was he bribed or not?') conceal normative commitments. Discourses make more than claims of reality – they accomplish what Schön and Rein (1994) have called the 'normative leap', or the connection between a representation of reality and its consequences for action. Within most versions of discourse theory, the strict dichotomy between facts and values ceases to make sense. Facts and values here are not treated as ontologically different; discourse theory treats them as different sides of the same coin. The 'is' and 'ought' shape each other in countless ways. Language is thus neither neutral nor static in communicating meaning. The awareness that language does not neutrally describe the world is important to corruption research. Subtle linguistic forms and associated symbolic actions shape our convictions and presuppositions (Van Twist 1994: 79).

How does research with discourse theory work? A researcher conducts discourse descriptions or analyses, the basis of which are texts. All verbal and written language can be considered. A discourse analysis shows which discursive objects and subjects emerge in social practices, and which conceptualizations are used. Consequently, what is left out in social practices also emerges. It is not the purpose of discourse analysis to retrieve what authors meant or felt. Discourse analysis is not a search for meaning in texts, empirical or otherwise. The analysis focuses on the *effects* of the texts on other texts. Hajer (1995: 54): 'discourse analysis investigates the boundaries between (...) the moral and the efficient, or how a particular framing of the dis-

cussion makes certain elements appear fixed or appropriate while other elements appear problematic’.

A discourse analysis inquires into forms of problematization and offers a narrative about the production of problems. Why is corruption considered a problem (or not a problem)? Some postmodern corruption scholars would answer that it is because of neo-liberal or Western interests (cf. Bahre 2005; Brown/Cloke 2004, 2005; Doig/Marquette 2005; Le Billon 2005; Roberts/Wright/O’Neill 2007; Szeftel 1998; Whyte 2007). We will return to this topic later.

In conducting a discourse analysis on corruption, we can establish the limits of what can and cannot be said in a particular context, what Foucault (1977) called ‘the conditions of possibility’ of a discourse. The analysis can identify the rules and resources that set the boundaries of what can be said, thought, and done in a particular (organizational) context or situation. Mauws (2000: 235):

‘Thus, if we are to comprehend how decisions are made (...) it is by examining the conditions of possibility in relation to which these statements are formulated, that is, the often implicit institutionalized speech practices that guide what is and what is not likely to be said (Bourdieu)’.

Describing a corruption case in this tradition makes the discourses the objects of study, rather than the (corrupt) moral agents. By doing so, moral aspects come to the fore. In the case of Zimbabwe, for example, Bracking (2009: 35) argues that ‘only through a critical poststructuralist analysis, which examines how ‘corrupt’ subjects are fixed discursively, can one find a consistent position on when concessionary state redistribution becomes constitutive of patrimonial state practice.’

Brown and Cloke (2005) explore the limitations of the dominant neo-liberal perspective on governance, showing how international financial institutions have been promoting a specific discourse on corruption in Nicaragua that separates it from its historicity and the specific political economy within which it developed. Within this discourse, governance and institutional reform are seen as ways to combat corruption and are within the limits of what can be said in corruption discourse, whereas possible solutions that look at the historical roots of the Nicaraguan culture, like closer private sector/government relations, are not.

Lazar (2005: 212, 223-224) focuses on everyday corruption and local politics in the highland city of El Alto in Bolivia, looking at perceptions of corruption at different political levels. Corruption and its ‘necessary counterpart’, public works (*obras*), serve as the key discursive elements for citizens to assert expectations of their leaders. Lazar recognizes the typical clientelistic structures pervading politics in which issues such as the *extent* to which public money is used for private gain, but especially redistributed in the form of *obras* or jobs to the people, are central. Rumor and gossip serve as a means for the people to hold their leaders accountable pre-emptively, to es-



establish the notion of a public good that their leaders should serve. Corruption discourse can also serve to express powerlessness and dissatisfaction to leaders not listening to the needs of the people, and in doing so, to offset citizens' limited capacity to hold their leaders accountable.

Ruud (2000: 271-272, 291) researches petty corruption of ordinary people in the rural eastern Indian state of West Bengal, trying to understand corruption on the basis of the levels and places of corruption's occurrences. He emphasizes that the practices exist within a fully developed normative system that is no less moral than any other (i.e., Western) normative system. We should not regard corruption as an isolated act with a particular body of ideas and values, but take into account parallels in other social practices (and other bodies of ideas and values); otherwise, corruption would be difficult to understand. The distinction between public and private, often the basis upon which something is defined as corrupt or not, does not seem to carry the same moral weight in all societies. From Ruud's case studies it becomes apparent that the application of the public/private distinction in individual cases is sometimes limited by 'other more weightier considerations'.

## 6. Storylines and metaphors

One way to study how discursive practices about corruption are shaped is to look at storylines and metaphors. Our own particular worldviews and discourses position us within discussions in terms of the concepts, metaphors, and stories of that discourse. For corruption researchers, it is important that a discourse analysis can show how forces in language influence moral positions by looking at the role metaphors and storylines play within a discourse. Discourse analysis can also gain perspectives into the structure, dynamics, and directions of conflicting discourses, like narrative strategies.

Stories play an important role in people's lives; in large part, they give meaning to them (Watson 1994). If you want to get to know someone, you ask for a life story. Stories tell about what is important and what is not. Philosophers like Johnson (1993) or McIntyre (1991) would go so far as to argue that stories are central to creating human understanding: 'I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?' (O'Connor 1997: 304). Fisher (1987: xiii) claims that 'all forms of human communication need to be seen fundamentally as stories'. It is therefore not surprising that stories are also important to studies of corruption. Many scholars agree that stories are filled with information and are efficient at conveying it (Roe 1994: 9). Boje (1991: 106) argues: 'People engage in a dynamic process of incremental refinement of their stories of new events as well as ongoing reinterpretations of culturally sacred story lines'; (1995: 1001): 'In sum people do not just tell stories, they tell stories to enact an account of themselves and their community'.

The assumption that meaning is produced in linguistic form fits well with exploring stories, which are simply one type of linguistic form, or elements of a discourse with certain characteristics. Stories are especially important for corruption researchers because they contain values – ideas about good and evil, right and wrong. For instance, Pujas and Rhodes (1999) address the report of the Committee of Experts of March 1999 concerning accusations of fraud and nepotism within the European Commission, in which a storyline develops of the crusade of a ‘clean north’ versus a ‘corrupt south’. That three of the four implicated Commissioners were from a ‘southern’ country (France, Spain, and Portugal) and only one from a ‘northern’ country (Germany) seemed to strengthen the view. Yet Pujas and Rhodes questioned its fairness:

‘Is there really a ‘clash of cultures’ in Europe between quite different types of public administration, responsible for a ‘fundamental division’ in the European institutions between the ambassadors of ‘clean’ northern government and the cynical representatives of closed, corrupt and clannish southern bureaucracy?’ (1999: 688-689).

Within stories, ‘is’ and ‘ought’ are closely connected. Even if they seem to give simple factual descriptions, an enormous implicit normative power lies within narratives. Hayden White (1980: 26): ‘What else could narrative closure exist of than the passage of one moral order to another? (...) Where, in any account of reality, narrativity is present, we can be sure that morality or a moralizing impulse is present too’. According to White, the events that are recorded in the narrative appear ‘real’ precisely insofar as they belong to an order of moral existence, just as they derive their meaning from their placement in this order. It is because the events described are or are not conducive to the establishment of social order that they find a place in the narrative attesting to their reality (Ettema/Glasser 1988: 10). A narrative analysis can therefore shed light on how different moral positions relate to each other. It shows how narrative structures (partly) determine moral positions and identities, and how they thereby influence the actions of individuals and organizations. And they show how internal dynamics of a discourse can influence the moral position taken; this can also be used strategically. An example from a study by Bracking (2009: 44):

‘These attempts by members of the political elite to gain political ground relative to one another by attempting to fix the others’ behavior as ‘corrupt’, entail ‘corruption’ acting as a signifier of moral detraction in a political discourse that pretends liberal reform but serves authoritarian power. Narratives like these often involve ‘illegal’ foreign exchange transactions (...) There is also a popular narrative of corruption acting as a moral censure of a rapacious elite’.

Scholars have pointed to the moral significance of metaphors. Weick (1979: 50), for example, has pointed to their operational consequences. Like stories, metaphors are important to corruption researchers because of the (often implicit) moral baggage they carry. Describing metaphors in discursive prac-

tices can bring clarity to how metaphors, in part, morally shape discursive practices, that is, how morality is embedded in discursive practices. This is also noted in the theoretical postmodern corruption theories. Just think of the consequences it has once we use the slogan of ‘war on corruption’. The metaphor of ‘war’ opens up a discursive space in which all kind of military and violent options are on the table to deal with the ‘problem.’ Describing corruption as ‘a cancer that eats away at the body politic’ portrays it as a threat to the continued existence of the state or its subordinate civil authorities.

We could also look at non-textual imagery such as symbols and powerful images that have portrayed corruption. Consider, for instance, a 2008 cartoon by the South-African newspaper Sunday Times in which ANC leader Jacob Zuma is portrayed as a potential rapist of Lady Justice. Shortly before that Zuma had been charged with corruption, and in 2006 had been acquitted of rape indictments.

## 7. The presence of the past

As stated above, meaning is always a contingent and historical achievement; corruption discourses are socially and *historically* constructed. To this point we have mostly looked at the social construction; many researchers, however, look for the ‘presence of the past’: historical corruption research can follow the traces of a discourse back in history, reveal the contingencies of a current corruption discourse, and thus dissolve the current coherence of systems of intelligibility. Research like this is called ‘genealogical’. For example, Wither analyzed the change in meaning of the word ‘racketeering’ in his study of corruption accusations against the teamsters union in the 1930s (Kreike/Jordan 2004). He also observed the steadily growing discrepancy between the public opinion of racketeering and the way the phenomenon was conceived on the shop floor (Witwer 2004: 197-238).

In a 2008 special issue of the public administration journal *Public Voices*, several historians showed how our current systems of understanding are a historical achievement: definitions and morality concerning corruption are in constant flux. By producing historical representations of corruption and its morality – which are often unfamiliar to 21<sup>st</sup> century Westerners – and sometimes by isolating the moments in which more familiar representations have emerged, historical corruption researchers can disclose the instabilities and chance elements of our current understandings of corruption (cf. Shapiro 1992).

Hoenderboom and Kerkhoff (2008) investigated an Early Modern Dutch corruption scandal concerning the transgressions of a local magistrate, Lodewijk Huygens, in the city of Gorinchem. The scandal shows the importance of a contextual approach towards corruption as different sources of val-

ues and standards of conduct made up the (in)capability and corruption of this magistrate, such as legal arguments, public opinion as expressed in pamphlets and codes of the shop floor. The codes of the shop floor show that an Early Modern magistrate such as Huygens should at least be able to maintain harmony and balance in everyday administration, especially concerning the bestowal of office, gift exchange, and appropriation of funds. The codes of the shop floor contrasted sharply with legal standards, which entirely prohibited the obtainment of offices by offering money or gifts. An unambiguous standard concerning what constituted corruption was therefore lacking (Hoenderboom/Kerkhoff 2008).

Kroeze (2008) presented a comparable study for the nineteenth century. He emphasized the role of scandals in shifts in administrative values, and then focused on an 1855 scandal concerning the selling of votes, which was in sharp contrast with the value dualism characteristic of the Early Modern period. A dominant set of liberal values became visible whereby, for instance, putting particular interests (provincial, individual) above the general interest in matters of political representation was not allowed. Public officials were also expected to act with 'dignity', 'openness', 'respect' and 'honor', and all parties more or less agreed on the seriousness of violating these important values. All parties involved therefore shared the same discourse (Kroeze 2008).

In the same issue of *Public Voices* Engels (2008) considered the nineteenth century to be a period in which existing conflicts between value systems were finally resolved, and focused on turning points. His comparison of anti-corruption movements in three countries and focus on the related motives does not only show the public-private dichotomy becoming clearer, but also a visible tendency towards centralization and corruption criticism closely connected to an anti-pluralist world of ideas comprising anti-capitalism, anti-liberalism, and anti-Semitism. Interestingly, Engels stated that there was no positive link in nineteenth century history between modernizing or democratizing forces and the anti-corruption movement (Engels 2008).

Other historians have simply shown how different perceptions of corruption were in the past, thus sensitizing us to their social constructivist nature. Will (2004), who has studied administration in late imperial China, describes how a Weberian-like ethos on sufficient remuneration for impartial administrators could clash with the impossibility of supplying sufficient salaries and with a rival ethic of loyalty to an administrator's extended family and place of birth. His work practically mirrored Sissener's (2001; see above) (Will 2004: 29-82). Woodfine, who did not 'seek to resolve the notorious difficulties of the concept of corruption, but will accept the term in the senses in which it was used in contemporary discourse' (2004: 167), studied corruption rhetoric in England during the first part of the eighteenth century. In a world that did not know a strict public-private dichotomy or a clear separation between politics and administration, and one that was characterized by patron-

age and clientage, what did Walpole's regime do to make it so vulnerable to accusations of corruption? Walpole, it turns out, grossly amplified things by turning corruption into an overt system and organizing machine politics much more thoroughly than before (Woodfine 2004: 167-196). Coulloudon – another historian whose approach resembles Sissener's – describes how corruption in the Soviet Union was a practical necessity because plan targets could often not be met without fraud. Failing to meet targets could have serious consequences for the workers involved. Superiors who committed the necessary fraud were looked upon favorably. Unsurprisingly, therefore, corrupt Soviet officials caught for fraud often felt no guilt at all (Coulloudon 2004: 247-249). Many more historical studies in which corruption is seen as a social construct exist. See for example the recent *Beiheft* of the *Historische Zeitschrift* (Engels/Fahrmeir/Nützenadel 2009).

## 8. Power and the consequences of anti-corruption discourses

There is considerable power in structured ways of viewing reality. Power in post-positivistic research is defined relationally rather than an institutional or personal feature. So-called genealogical<sup>1</sup> discourse analyses of corruption cases and corruption controversies analyze how power and knowledge function, how the rules and resources that set the limits of what can be said are working. Foucault (1977; 1984) has shown how power works through 'subjectification.' Bracking (2009: 36) argues that

'the formal definition of corruption used by international financial institutions (...) acts in practice as a strategic resource and signifier within World Bank political discourse, indicating bad governance, illegitimacy and geopolitical position (...) Rather it is the wider strategic role that the concept plays as a disciplinary governance concept which is critical to donors' attempted management of African politics and societies.'

Every discourse claims to talk about reality. In doing so, it classifies what is (not) true permitted, desirable, and so on. Truth and power are closely related. As Foucault (1984: 74) stated, 'Truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which induces and which extend it; a 'regime of truth''. Power is not just repressive; it is always productive. A genealogical discourse analysis of corruption cases can reveal some of the ways power

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1 By using a grammar in its descriptions that replaces the subject with consciousness by a subject as the receiver of social meaning, static concepts are in genealogy made fluid in a historical process. Within genealogy, Foucault (e.g. 1977) looked for the way forms of problematizations are shaped by other practices. Shapiro (1992: 29): 'Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. Committed to inquiry, it seeks endlessly to dissolve the coherence of systems of intelligibility that give individual and collective identities to persons/peoples and to the orders that house them by recreating the process of descent within which subjectivities and objectivities are produced'.

functions and can thus add to the understanding of the meaning of the corruption cases. It can follow back in history the traces of a corruption discourse and reveal the contingencies of a current discourse.

Building partly on the work of Foucault, some have shown how discourses on corruption with their inherent worldviews give some an advantage over others. For example, Roberts et al. (2007) have shown how the discourse on governance in the so-called Pacific Plan resulted in a technocratic direction such that a particularly narrow conceptualization of governance dominates. 'In a direct reading of the Pacific Plan and the interventions it empowers there is ample evidence that governance (good and bad) is used in a disciplining way' (Roberts/Wright/O'Neill 2007: 981). As a result, most emphasis in the region was laid on institution building (offices of auditing, statisticians, and so on).

'The definitions and modes of monitoring governance provide a framework through (...) which Pacific Island elites (...) are able to know and analyze their region (...). As the Pacific comes under the gaze of an expert calculus that frames forms of governing as 'good' or 'bad' the island nations and people are once again defined in terms of lack, with answers proffered by development experts' (Roberts/Wright/O'Neill 2007: 978/979).

To reveal the forces or power of a discourse, genealogy has to go back to the moment in which an interpretation or identity became dominant within a discourse, like the Pacific Plan, in which case many alternatives for the dominant governance discourses are available. In fact, in some cases the alternatives effectively challenge the governance interpretations of the Plan. 'The continual remake of governance occurs in several ways as social movements act to make strategic use of the term within the context of the Pacific Plan and beyond it' (Roberts/Wright/O'Neill 2007: 980).

In so-called critical corruption studies, questions are asked about the consequences of the international anti-corruption measures. Brown and Cloke (2006: 281): 'Recently, together with several other commentators (Hanlon 2004; Harrison 2003; Michael 2004; Polzer 2001; Szeftel 1998; Williams/Bearre 1999) we have been promoting the need for critical academic reflection upon the growing calls for an international 'anti-corruption' crusade'. Why, then, has there been such an explosion of interest in corruption since the 1990s, and why is there such an apparent political commitment towards tackling the problem (Brown/Cloke 2004) when there is no evidence that corrupt behavior has increased? Brown and Cloke (2004) argue that an important factor has been shifting geopolitical priorities after the end of the Cold War. The effects of anti-corruption measures turn out to be manifold, and towards much more than simply reducing the levels of corruption.

'Despite the evolution of structural adjustment into a kindlier, cuddlier poverty reduction version, within the international financial institutions there is no serious commitment to address the issues of regulation and control so vital to any understanding or control of corruption that debilitates countries of the North, East, West and South' (Brown/Cloke 2007: 318).

Once again, the importance of context is emphasized. Consequences of anything will always depend on the particular situation, so it is stressed. Brown and Cloke (2006: 282/283):

‘This lack of detailed, contextualized analysis of the implementation of supposed anti-corruption initiatives is, we would argue, reflected everywhere, rather than having anything to do with any uniqueness of Nicaraguan circumstances (...) we have also come across a series of major reservations expressed particularly by those whose evaluation of such activities stems from long-term research experience in the country concerned (...) Taken together, these points reflect our concerns that in too many cases what is referred to as corruption has been taken out of the context within which it occurs both globally (in terms of the interactions between North and South, the transforming influence of globalization etc.) and locally (reflecting a tendency to seek for global explanations for and solutions to a monolithic signifier named corruption, rather than more detailed considerations of the complex dynamics of the nature of multiple, interlinked corruptions within individual societies)’.

Most of the critical corruption studies are not against anti-corruption measures per se, but what is labeled ‘corrupt’, what is not, and the effects thereof are critical. A special concern is what the negative consequences will be for the poor (e.g. Brown/Cloke 2006).

The *intentions* of anti-corruption discourses are questioned as well. Some claim, for example, that such discourses reflect a post-Washington consensus seeking to reinvigorate regulatory institutions while maintaining blame for the failure of development in South American governments (Le Billon 2005: 687). Another example: ‘Policy on corruption is deeply embedded within the wider constructions of global neo-liberal and free market economic governance (Brown/Cloke 2004, 2005; Marquette 2003; Szeftel 1998), where a clear divide between the political and economic and between the public and private spheres is expected’ (Bracking 2009: 37) – remarks similar to Roberts et al. in their study on the Pacific Plan. Kondos focuses on the meaning of favoritism using a set of Nepalese cultural practices, showing that ‘the favour’ and therefore ‘partiality’ as values are in accordance with Hindu cultural values. Yet he also explains how Western intellectuals tend to construct ‘favoritism’ to mean corruption and its motives. As a result an ideological conflict in the field of political ethics arises from Western pressure to adopt the principle of ‘impartiality’ in government (Kondos 1987). Gupta (1995: 375-402) focuses on discourses of corruption in contemporary India, specifically, practices within the lower echelons of Indian bureaucracy and representations of the state in the mass media. He stresses vigilance toward the imperialism of the Western conceptual apparatus, questioning the Eurocentric distinction between state and civil society and the conceptualization of the state as a unitary entity. Some also see the use of (insincere) anti-corruption discourse as a strategic tool to legitimize the invasion of Iraq (Le Billon 2005; Whyte 2007).

In some critical corruption studies we find criticism of ideologies, especially neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is not just blamed for promoting the interests of the elite via anti-corruption discourses; some even blame it for *causing* corruption. Whyte (2007: 179), for example, states: 'Neo-liberalism creates a fertile environment for 'corrupt' market transactions to flourish, because it seeks the creation of limited space as a means of promoting entrepreneurialism and the pursuit of self-interests', once again reminding us of Roberts et al. and the Pacific Plan. Paradoxically, the Enron scandal, which involved falsification of balance sheets, manipulation of accounting practices, and the creation of an image of financial health, showed the pervasive nature of corruption within corporate America – a hotbed of neo-liberal thought. MacLennan (2005: 156, 159) states, 'corruption is more than a simple, isolated crime committed for personal gain. It is a part of corporate and political, culture – more pervasive and acceptable among elites than we realize. In short, it is *becoming institutionalized*'.

Others are very critical of almost all anticorruption measures – integrity workshops, national integrity system analysis, anti-corruption commissions – in the sense that they are seen as parts of wider mendacious practices where people are subjected as supernumeraries to human development: 'The anti-corruption discourse and donor practice itself can cause perverse effects which aggravate cycles of deteriorating governance (discussed by various authors in Bracking 2007)' (Bracking 2009: 37). Just as we saw in the Pacific Plan example (Roberts/Wright/O'Neill 2007), it is often stated in critical corruption literature that the current dominating anti-corruption discourse is too focused on technical solutions and the public-private distinction, resulting in too much attention to the public sector as the major cause of corruption. In short, the 'anti-corruption crusade needs to be shorn of its anti-state bias' (Brown/Cloke 2004: 291).

## 9. Fighting Corruption

So what remedies do post-positivist corruption scholars propose? Clearly, they are cautious about supporting anti-corruption measures. After all, to them any interpretation of corruption and its causes is contestable. Applying a post-positivist perspective to corruption could most importantly sensitize us to the fact that people live in different social realities, and therefore have different perceptions of what constitutes corruption. Knowing so might give us Western Weberians pause before flinging accusations of corruption. We should also critically study the effects of (academic) corruption discourses that necessarily result from any specific interpretation of or theory on the causes of corruption.

For Bourdieu/Wacquant (1992) *reflexivity* is key to entailing awareness of the effects of one's own social position, perceptions, observations, and the



conditions of understanding that structure discourse. As an act of self-reference reflexivity serves to make explicit the underlying unthought structures that frame our social world. Lennerfors (2008: 393-397) asks in his dissertation how postmodern philosophers would have viewed corruption – one of his sections is called ‘Baumanian corruption’- had they dealt with the phenomenon. He then applies these insights to a Swedish case. In the last chapter of his book he asks himself what ‘gifts’ he has presented to practitioners, and ‘reflection’ is his answer. He invites administrators to reflect on clear rules and the pros and cons of grey zones. He also warns against concentrating on rules instead of on the underlying values. Reflection should also be given to the exact limits between the public and private spheres. As not everyone in an organization shares the same corruption discourse, reflection on which group of colleagues one would like to identify with could also be helpful. He issues a similar invitation to reflect on one’s attitude to the private parties involved, and invites the public in general to reflect on the reasons behind the accusations of corruption it reads in the newspapers.

Tänzler, who is scientific coordinator of ‘Crime and Culture: An International Research Project within the Sixth Framework Programme of the European Commission’, is rather more ambitious. The project he coordinates is aimed at finding ‘means to optimise corruption prevention in the EU’. The project’s point of departure is that the different perceptions of what constitutes corruption in the EU are a major obstacle to fighting it, as the remedies might well be based on corruption definitions not shared by the people they are targeting. Making clear what different perceptions of corruption European cultures hold might increase the fit between these perceptions, and the remedies used. The project explicitly aims at finding new remedies. It might thus lead to more success in combating corruption in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Alternative explanations and understanding of corruption in particular countries can help us reconsider the effectiveness of existing policy instruments to combat corruption. Above all, the importance of context became clear. Too often, corruption and its remedies are discussed outside its social and historical context. This is dangerous because, whatever way one looks at the causes of corruption, the contingencies are many. Any proposed solution should take as many contingencies as possible into account.

## 10. Conclusion

In this chapter we looked at how post-positivistic theories study and view the causes of corruption and the ontological stances on which the theories are based (the importance of language and discourse). We saw that post-positivistic scholars do not study what corruption ‘really’ is or means, but

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2 <http://www.unikonstanz.de/crimeandculture/project.htm>.

how the definitions of corruption come about, both in academic and all other discourses on corruption. And, very importantly, we looked at the *effects* of using the concept.

It turns out that there is no unifying post-positivistic corruption approach; indeed, most post-positivistic researchers denounce classifications. Lennerfors (2008: 309): 'Had Bauman written about corruption, he might have claimed that the real issue of corruption lies within the more general project of classification and division – and hence the structuring of the world as such (...) Bauman describes classification as an act of violence.' Many of the studies in this chapter turned out to have an affinity with social constructivist ideas, just as theories that look at the (power) effects of discourses on corruption. Or, as Lennerfors (2008: 307) put it, 'A postmodern understanding of corruption is related to ambiguity and that no classification of the world is accurate.' In other words, we live in an ambiguous world with no clear categories of right and wrong, yet there are demands for clarity and demarcation. This illustrates why, throughout the chapter, the *context* of corruption research and discourses is fundamental.

The causes studied here were primarily those of the *usage* of the label 'corruption'. This in clear contrast to chapters in this volume that see corruption as a clear phenomenon whose causes can, at least in principle, be established. This does not mean that we believe it is not useful to try to establish the causes of corruption; the other chapters provide new invaluable insights. The value this chapter has added, however, is foremostly to show how useful it is to critically study the effects of corruption discourses. And it ends with a plea to corruption scholars to critically reflect on the effects that their own academic discourses have on corruption.